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P L E A

FOR THE

Poor and Distressed,

Against the BILL

*For granting an Excise upon Wines and  
Spirits distilled, sold by Retail, or  
consumed within this Province, &c.*



B O S T O N,

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## A Plea for the Poor and Distressed,

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**I**T has been said of this Act, that it is intended to cause such as spend their Money unnecessarily in strong Liquors, luxurious living, &c. to pay something more than others towards the Support of Government; whether as a Punishment, or to restrain them, if it could be confin'd only to such Persons, the End proposed would be good; and no doubt the good Intention of the Legislators in passing this Bill was such; but to distress the Poor and Needy could not be intended by it; nor do we suppose it was to prevent the frugal and necessary Use of Spirituous Liquors, but to tax the Excess and unnecessary Use of them. Therefore (as we have Leave) let us examine and find whether this Act will answer the proposed End, without doing more Hurt than Good; and this may be done by comparing the different Manner of Living and Circumstances of three several Sorts of Persons in the Province.

1. The prudent, frugal, industrious honest Farmers and Husbandmen, who live in Plenty, Peace and Safety, not acquainted with the Way and Manner that others live.

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2. The poor exposed suffering People in the Frontiers, labouring and exposing themselves to Danger, and patiently enduring Cold and Hunger, and many other Hardships in the Woods, endeavouring to make Settlements for themselves and their Children, in doing of which they are a Wall, Cover and Defence to the Inland Plantations.

3. The Fishermen, necessary and profitable to the Country; whose Labour is great, their Profits little, and their Comforts less.

*First* then, those Farmers and Husbandmen living in old Towns and Plantations, who have other Towns settled outside them, live and enjoy their Families and Estates in Peace and Safety; they can attend their Business and Labours without Fear; they have all the Blessings of the Heavens; every Rain and Dew refreshes the Fruits of their Lands, which bring them plenty of the best Food and good Raiment as the Earth can produce, and great variety of good Liquors (much better than Rum, the principal Thing aim'd at in this Bill to pay Excise for) they can and do make excellent Beer, Cider, and a variety of Spirituous Liquors, all of the Fruits of their Farms, the Lands, Vines, Trees, Bushes and Herbs, which with only the Care and Labour of the Husbandman and his own Family, with no other Expence, produce Plenty of rich Food, Raiment and exhilarating Spirits; equal as to its Usefulness to any in the World. They have it not only in plenty for their own Use, but a great deal to spare, which they sell for Money, and enrich themselves.—They sleep quietly in their Houses, their Fields are well secured from Danger, every one sits quietly under his Vines and Fruit Trees, and none can make them afraid. They hear not (or at least they fear not) the Alarm of War; their Persons, Families and Estates are secure, protected and defended by the best Government upon Earth, and Laws which are as a Wall or Fence round about them, that none dare to touch them or theirs to their hurt, but may expect to be severely punished.—The good Provi-

Providence of God has made a Hedge about them in such Manner as their Civil and Religious Liberties and Privileges are so secured to them, as there is no Place in any Country, in any Nation or Kingdom, in more happy Circumstances than these are in; it is much better than the Condition their Fore-Fathers were in, for they in Times past had War and Trouble. Then surely these People who now thus enjoy the Blessings of Heaven to such a Degree in all Respects, would take it as a great Injury done them (and it may be so) to say of them that they are unwilling to bear a due Proportion according to their Ability, of the Charges of the Support of such a Government under which they enjoy so much Good: They live as they list, their Estates are their own, absolutely their own in Fee. No Lords over them, nor Quit Rents to pay, all are free Men and their Estates free, and they like *Gideon's Brethren*, *each one resembles the Children of a King*.

*Secondly.* The poor exposed suffering People in the Frontiers, those who go into the Wilderness to clear and subdue the Lands to make Settlements, are generally very poor, and they must suffer great Hardships and Dangers; the Wilderness produces them no Corn for Bread, they must with great Pains clear the Land before they can till it:—A little Land takes many Years Labour to subdue and make it profitable, or in any considerable Measure useful; and while they are doing that, they must suffer for want of Victuals.—If they can have the Lands given them for clearing and settling it, they must first cut their Wood and Timber to sell for Food to support Life. Many of them are not able to buy Oxen to hale their Wood and Timber to a Landing Place for sale, but are obliged to carry Wood and Timber upon their Shoulders to buy Bread and Cloathing for themselves and their Children, ready to faint under their Burdens, yet pressed on by pinching Want, get something to sell to relieve them; but then they must venture it over Sea for Corn and Pork, and other Necessaries of Life, and wait the return, which is sometimes long coming,

ing, sometimes no return at all; but if they do receive the returns of their Labour, that is perhaps a little Indian Corn for Bread, and a little lean salt Meat, which may help to keep them alive as long as it lasts; but what is their Drink? Generally in the Woods their Drink is Water, not from good and wholsom Springs, but from Rivulets issuing from unwholsom Ponds and Marshes, often poisoned with Spawns of Toads, Frogs, creeping Things, hateful Insects and Vermine, soaking through Heaths and Box and other poisonous Bogs, Roots and Bushes, which render the Waters very unwholsom, causing many Sicknesses and Deaths.—And when they have clear'd a few Acres of Land, and can keep a Cow or two, this is something, but will not support them, their Dependance must still be chiefly upon their Lumber for their living, their Lands not yet affording half sufficient for the support of their Families.—Then comes War, or a Rumour of War; Indians do Mischief, their Houses are like weak and defenceless Wigwams, they must fly or die; some get together into small Huts fenced in with Poles, to save their Lives, and all they had at home laid Waste and destroyed.—To keep in their weak Garrisons without Work, is Death; if they venture out, there is nothing but melancholy Aspects, Desolations and Fear on every Side; they are in continual Distress, the Enemy sculking to catch them; the Famine is within their Walls; the Sword of the Wilderness without; difficult which Death to choose;—their Living is without any real Comfort:—Their Food but mean and scanty, their Cloathing rent and torn, scarcely sufficient to keep them tolerably warm in the Winter; Wool and Flax they have none, or very little, their Wants are such as cannot be easily express'd; none knows their Sufferings, Fears, Dangers and Sorrows, but those who have suffered with them; neither can they themselves express it.—Sometimes, when some of these poor Wretches have some Returns for their Wood and Timber, perhaps they may get a Bottle or Gallon of Rum to drink in the Woods, to prevent the evil Effects of those

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Spawns and noxious Waters, and this is all they can have to drink (and this but seldom) besides such Waters; it is but little Rum in all they can get; Beer they cannot have, Cider is not there, no Fruit Trees in the Woods and new Plantations; if any raise a Bushel of Barley, they must eat it or starve; they cannot spare any for Malt; and now if they drink a Dram of Rum, they must keep account how much, and where and when they had it, and sware to it, and pay Excise for it too, or pay £.10 Lawful Money, as shall please the Deputy Excise Man.

Now compare these People's living with the former. Would the meanest Farmer or Husbandman before-mentioned exchange Conditions or Livings with any of these? Surely no.—Yet Money to support the Government (if this Bill should pass) must be taken from these poor half starved People, much more than their Proportion according to their Estates, to ease the other who live at ease in safety, and were never acquainted with Hunger or Thirst.—The Country allows Soldiers in Garrison Beer to drink, if marching Men, a certain Allowance of Rum; which they don't pay Excise for, besides their daily Allowance of Bread and Meat. Such Allowance many of these poor Inhabitants gladly would, but cannot get so much to live upon as well as Soldiers, yet tho' as much exposed as Soldiers, and more too; they must pay Excise for every Bottle of Rum they or their Families drink, without regarding the necessity they are under, and without allowing them to live like other Men: The Farmer's Slaves in the Country, live abundantly better than most Men in the new Plantations can possibly live.

Farmers and Husbandmen have no need of Rum, they have better Liquor and better living in all Respects, and all of their own raising.—And if they knew or could be made sensible of the miserable Condition, Difficulties and Distresses of their poor Brethren and Neighbours who live in the Frontier Towns, they themselves of more Compassion would pay all their Taxes and their Excise too for them, and let these poor People go free.—They would  
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consider that some must be outside next to the Indians, and it is impossible but they must suffer and endure many Hardships.—And to add weight to their heavy Burthens; by exacting an Excise upon them for the Necessaries of Life they use, such as Rum; and other spirituous Liquors; to them in the Woods, is extreme hard.

*Thirdly.* The Fishermen; their Calling is honest, and a great Benefit to the Country in many respects.—The Fish and Lumber is all that this Country has of its own Produce, to export and trade with in other Parts of the World, to import Commodities from other Countries which are necessary to be used here; and that the Fishery ought to be encouraged none will deny.—The Work and Business is dangerous, hard and difficult. The Men are always exposed to the *Indian* and *French* Pirates at Sea; also in their open Boats to the Storms, Rocks and Tempests, many Times not having a dry Garment for many Days or Weeks together; the Sea raging and breaking over them, looks as if they should be immediately swallowed up; they suffer Wet and Cold, and Watching in bad Weather, and when the Weather is fair, the unwholesome Scent which always attends their Business from which they cannot go, but must endure it and work too; all this will try the strongest Constitution; and in this Business it is necessary, and they must take a little Rum or other Spirits to keep up their Spirits, or they must surfeit or faint in their nasty, tho' necessary Employment. These Men, so much exposed every Day and Hour to the Danger of the Seas, and in Perils which way soever they turn, all Men who are acquainted with that Business allow, that they need and should use more Rum than is necessary in any other Calling whatsoever: Yet no Farmer or Husbandman would care to exchange Conditions with these for the sake of their Rum.—Husbandmen can lay dry in their Beds in stormy Weather, when Fishermen are most exposed to the Weather, they must endure it or sink, Wet, Cold and Hunger too, or eat raw Meat, as is  
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sometimes the Case; and notwithstanding all the Fisherman's Labours and Sufferings and great Pains he takes to live, they are generally very poor and in Debt, all they can get in the Year, will scarcely pay the Farmers for Corn and Meat to supply their poor Families in their Absence. Let them be ever so industrious, their Living is but mean and low, yet because they drink pretty much Rum, seven times their Share of the Support of Government must be laid upon them by Way of Excise: These have little or no Estates to be saved or lost, and those that have great Estates safe and secure from Danger, are thereby eased of their Taxes, tho' much better able to pay them.

It is well known, that the Fishery and Lumber Trade is all that this Country has of its own Produce to trade and purchase Rum, Salt, Molasses, Cotton, Sugar, Wine and other Necessaries, from all parts of the World where we can Trade; and if those who labour in Peril of their Lives, and procure those very Things necessary to carry on our Trade and Merchandize, and procure Rum, &c. have no Liberty to make free Use of what comes by their own painful Labour and Care; they are in worse Condition than were the Oxen in old Times, whose Mouths were not to be muzzel'd when they tread out the Corn. All their doleful Circumstances claim Pity and Compassion: And if instead of taking any Excise of these poor People in the Frontiers and Fishery for the Rum they drink; by an Excise upon Cider and Malt, there should be a Soldiers Allowance of Rum and some other Bounty given to each of them, to encourage them and quicken their slow Motions towards their Settlements and Fishery, this would be more profitable for the Country than this strange sort of Excise. The Frontiers would be sooner settled strong and defenceable, and be a Wall to all the inland Parts of the Country, and they within safely raise Supply for the Fishery, which would be of great Service to all in every State and Condition in the Country, much  
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more than this Excise will ever be.—

But here I am aware of an Objection, viz. That Cider and Malt is their own Produce, Answer, so is Rum as much the Fishermen and Lumber Men's. Work and Produce as that is of the others, and is as much the Blood of these Men who venture their Lives in Jeopardy for it, as the Water of the Well of *Bethlehem* was the Blood of *David's* three mighty Men, and should these now pay Excise to favour those who never knew Danger?

✍ Taxes for the Support of Government is the best Money we lay out, whatever any may think of it; it is necessary next to Life itself, for without Government Life would be but a Burthen; it is a just Debt due from every one that lives in and hath the Benefit and Protection of the Government, in Proportion to their Substance kept and secured to them by it; and to take from the poor and needy to ease those who are able and ought to pay it, it is not equal.

✍ The Fish and Lumber cannot be all used here, but is sent to the West India Islands, and part of the Rum purchased by these Commodities is sent to *Virginia, Carolina*; and other Places, to procure Corn and Pork, to enable them to go on with their Labours and Fishery, or it must cease, for this Country can't supply them with all Things necessary.

The Eastern Frontiers, more than a hundred Miles in length by the Sea (is all that the Province has now to defend) not one Town in it but what lies exposed both to the Sea and Land Rovers, has been the Seat of War in all Times of War ever since *New-England* was first settled; every Town except three have been several Times wholly broken up and destroyed, and laid Waste many Years, and those three have had but a miserable Life; sometimes one part of a Town destroyed by the Indians; and sometimes another part of the same, and this

was the Case with all the three, always in Fear and in Danger; they could not improve their Lands: Never was any Town in the Country able to raise sufficient Provision for their own Inhabitants, by reason of their continual Troubles: Their Dependance has been and still is in almost every Town in the Country for their Victuals and Cloaths to be procured by their Lumber and Fishery, both which for some Years past have fail'd and come short of a sufficiency: They have not had Times of Peace sufficient to raise Orchards and Fruit Trees: In a few Years of War their deserted Fields are grown over with Bushes, and upon resettling requires new fencing and clearing, and Time to bring it fit to till.—They need some Cordial to comfort them in their Labours, which their Lands will not produce. They are glad of poor Food, and drink Water without any Thing else.—Then is there any Sin in the necessary and temperate Use of Rum? Must these be denied the use of a little Rum, the Fruit of their own Labour, or pay Excise for it, because others have no need of it, but live without it better than these can with it?—Does it hurt any Body for these to have a little such Spirits, which the Country think necessary to allow Soldiers in their Service?—What Injury is it to those who use little or no Rum themselves, if these at their own Cost do use some?

An Excise upon Cider and Malt would raise more Money than this, and as I conceive would be a much better way, for those best able would pay it.—As to the Method of collecting this new Sort of Excise, several have written their Thoughts, take mine also. Concerning the Behaviour of the Deputy Excise-Man towards several sorts of Persons, who must submit to be examined and sworn, as the Excise-Man or his Deputy pleases, he can exact or dispence with the Oath; he is at Liberty, and those subjected to his Authority are the Honourable Councillors, the Judges and Magistrates of the Land, the Gentleman Yeoman and Tradesman, every Degree, Office and Cal-

ling (except a few Clergymen) Women also must endure a strict Examination, and perhaps answer to very impertinent Questions, or the unmannerly Deputy will be affronted.

May it not be compared to Popish Auricular Confession, or perhaps worse in some respects? for, whether they confess their Sins or not, they are like to suffer severe Penance. A poor labouring Man that in the Course of the Year has had eight or ten Bottles or Pints of Rum, more or less, perhaps given to him by his Employers after faithful Service, to make merry, keeps no Account, nor does he know how to keep any, nor think it necessary, or it may be neglects it, and forgets whether he had half of it from a Person licenced or not; he consumes it in his Family, don't expect to be call'd to Account for it, but finds himself mistaken; when the Excise Man's Deputy comes, if he likes the poor Man's Wife, he will not like his Account, will not agree with him nor acquit him; it may be the Man cannot swear to any Account; his Excise perhaps might amount to *One Shilling*, Lawful Money, and no more, yet he is threatned with the Penalty of *Ten Pounds*, that is £ 75. old Tenor, which is, it may be, more than such a Man can get in Silver Money for his Labour in seven Years, and to pay that Sum would break up and destroy the Man and his Family. *Ten Pounds*, Lawful Money, is the Penalty, no Chancery in the Matter; none can remit the Fine but the Deputy Exciseman; be this Man never so poor or innocent, he don't swear, and it is the Pleasure of the Exciseman's Deputy that he shall be prosecuted, who is not worth the Money, nor is he ever like to be able to pay it; the Cost of making any Defence will ruin him, to Prison he must go, and feed the Jaylor, tho' he starves himself; his Wife and Children have nothing to eat but his daily Earnings, Partners with him in his Sin in consuming the Bottle of Rum.—Terrified at the Apprehension of his being taken from them, they find the Deputy Exciseman  
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inexorable, and are almost driven to Despair.—Tho' the General Court did not know who would be the Man, they have made Law enough for him to manage and triumph (not as they expected) but as he pleases.—Then if he in his abundant Lenity shall, after much threatening, signify that the poor Man may be excused from a Prosecution, and from paying the Fine upon Terms he offers, to save the Man and his Family from ruin, the poor Woman, who always intended Honesty, and now had rather continue so than otherwise; yet, to prevent what she feared would be a worse Evil, consents or submits to sacrifice her Virtue to the lecherous Humour of a brawny Deputy-Exciseman.

This is no uncharitable Surmise, but natural to suppose; and I am fully of Opinion, that if this Bill passes the Seal of the Province, there will be many Instances of this Kind in Town and Country, to the great Disturbance of both.

This Act as I apprehend it, is big with many arbitrary Powers, Authorities and Advantages unwarily (not designedly) given to Persons who the Legislators know not, nor how they will use their Authority; the vilest of Men may be recommended, and obtain that Office too late to be remedied, and so this Act may eventually put a Sword into the Hand of a Rogue, to destroy the Poor, and he will doubtless make Use of it.

No Courts of Judicature have any dispensing Power like this of the Exciseman.—They are bound to do Justice according to the Laws. They may not say, this innocent Person shall be punished, and that guilty Person go free: But all this at the absolute Will and Pleasure of a Deputy Exciseman may be done, perhaps by such a Fellow as caused the Insurrection called *Wat Tyler's Rebellion*, which cost many thousand Persons Lives.

The Governour's discerning Eye, and fatherly Care of the Province, in not passing this Act, is very conspicuous, and ought never to be forgotten : It is having Compassion on this People ;—saving them with Fear, pulling them out of the Fire.—It is to be hoped, as he had Wisdom to foresee the evil Consequences of it, and Justice with Compassion to stay this Act from taking Effect, that he will still continue his good Will and fatherly Kindness towards the Country, and finally to put a stop to this Act ; in doing of which, he will, as I imagine, prevent many Evils that otherwise would unavoidably follow.

As the Honourable House of Representatives has published part of the *Excise Bill*, on Purpose that the Minds of the Inhabitants of the Province concerning it may be known ; it is supposed that they expect and desire such Persons as do not like the Bill, to let them know their Thoughts about it with freedom: Nothing herein is meant or intended to give Offence to the House, or to any particular Person, but to shew the Opinion of the Writer, which is call'd for, (however differing from others) it is here published, and he hopes will be favourably interpreted ; and that if any Excise be granted, it may not extend to private Families, and that those poor Persons in the Frontiers and Fishery may be excused from paying any ;—encouraged in their Business ;—and some better Method found for collecting the Excise that may be granted ;—which is humbly submitted by their Advocate.



